



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობათა კვლევის ფონდი
GEORGIAN FOUNDATION FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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**ევროკავშირის როლი საქართველო-რუსეთის
ურთიერთობების ნორმალიზაციაში:
პოტენციალი, შეზღუდვები**

არჩილ გეგეშიძე



**THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE
NORMALISATION OF THE GEORGIA-RUSSIA
RELATIONSHIP: PROMISES AND IMPEDIMENTS**

ARCHIL GEGESHIDZE

ექსპერტის აზრი

EXPERT OPINION

მარტი

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საავტორო უფლებები დაცულია და ეკუთვნის საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობათა კვლევის ფონდს. წერილობითი ნებართვის გარეშე წიგნის არცერთი ნაწილი არ შეიძლება გადაიბეჭდოს ნებისმიერი, მათ შორის ელექტრონული ან მექანიკური ფორმით.

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The Role of the European Union in the Normalisation of the Georgia-Russia Relationship: Promises and Impediments

Georgia's inclusion in the European Neighbourhood Policy has enhanced the importance of the European Union in the context of the country's development objectives. Concurrently, an exaggerated ability of EU resources to work for Georgia have raised expectations that will be difficult to meet. Assistance in the normalisation of Georgia-Russia relations is one such issue. This paper aims at bringing a greater clarification of the EU's potential as a mediator. For this purpose, the root causes of the problems in Georgia-Russia relations and the characteristics of Russian policy will be considered along with an assessment of the EU's potential for mediation.

Russian Policy towards Georgia: Goals and Motivation

Historical Aspect. The relationship between Georgia and Russia has always been problematic with bilateral relations in the wake of restoring national independence often reaching a critical and, therefore, dangerous phase for the security and stability of the Georgian state. Naturally, there were periods of *détente* but this had a temporary or even false character. Throughout its history, Georgia has always declared and genuinely aspired towards good neighbourly and equal partnerships with Russia. Regrettably, these principles of building relationships appeared to be unacceptable for Russia and remain so even today. Georgia, which has been seeking to build amicable relations with neighbouring or distant nations, was successful everywhere except with Russia. In fact, Russia has always been—and remains to be—the only country in the world with which Georgia has more serious unsettled problems than mutually beneficial agreements.

Russia's unacceptance of Georgia's independence is the reason for the plethora of acute problems in the Georgia-Russia bilateral relations of the 1990s. The tense relations came, first of all, from Russia's desire to be both a Big Brother for Georgia and, at the same time, to punish it as well. The motivation for such a punishment emerged immediately upon the disintegration of the Soviet Union when Russia regarded Georgia as an unreliable and disloyal country. Such an attitude in its turn was formed on the basis of the belief that the national movement in Georgia was the first and primary catalyst of the centrifugal processes in the Soviet Union, on one hand, and that Georgia's leader—in then president Eduard Shevardnadze, who played a decisive role in the break-up of the Soviet Empire—was both dangerous and untrustworthy for Russia's interests, on the other. The collapse of the Soviet Empire appeared to be the most unacceptable fact for the new political elite in Russia. Even today, many amongst them are unable to hide their feelings of nostalgia for the lost might of Russia.

By the beginning of the new century, Georgia had clearly drawn up its new foreign policy priorities wherein the nation's basic course of development was directed towards the country's integration into Western military-political and economic structures. This period coincided with the coming to power of Vladimir Putin. In its turn, Russia's foreign policy became more streamlined and focused. This intended to preserve and further enhance Russia's influence over the entire post-Soviet space including, and especially, in the Caucasus. By default, this was an impediment for Georgia's becoming integrated into the Euro-Atlantic space. The conflict of interests reached its apogee after a new government came to power in Georgia when President Saakashvili's foreign policy became more "aggressive" and the country began to take fast steps towards Euro-Atlantic integration. A former single irritant in Georgia-Russia relations was now doubled. In other words,

punishing Georgia was now augmented by an added motivation to hinder the country's democratic development and its accession to NATO. This notwithstanding, Georgian authorities continued to advance along their chosen course whilst in parallel attempting to lessen the "Russia factor" through the carrying out of a principled policy. One of the most remarkable outcomes of such a policy was Russia's forced agreement to withdraw its military bases from Georgia. In response, Russia at first banned the import of Georgian citrus and other garden crops and then began to banish Georgian wines and mineral waters from the Russian market on various pretexts. The Georgian side, not wanting to lose the initiative, started to discredit Russia's conflict mediation role followed by the demand for the modification of the formats of both conflict resolution talks and peacekeeping operations in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region.¹ Tensions between the two countries culminated after August and September 2006 initially when, as a result of the successful police operation in the Kodori Gorge, the jurisdiction of the central authorities was re-established followed by the placement therein of the Government-in-exile of Abkhazia. Adding to the problem was the detention of four Russian officers for espionage charges. They were soon publicly passed over to the OSCE Representative, who had arrived in Tbilisi specifically for this purpose, in a manner which was a humiliation for Russia. In response, Russia immediately recalled its ambassador and terminated transportation and postal communication with Georgia. Concurrently, Russia began to expel Georgian citizens and forcibly squeeze out Georgian businesses. These sanctions, in fact, took the form of a blockade with Georgia-Russia relations subsequently becoming extremely cold and reaching an unprecedented low

¹ The term Tskhinvali Region refers to South Ossetia, a former autonomous region of Soviet Georgia. Following the declaration of independence of Georgia, the autonomy of South Ossetia was abolished. Now, the status of this territory is the major problem within the existing conflict. Independent Georgia does not recognise South Ossetia as a distinct or independent entity, instead referring to the region by either its historic medieval name of *Samachablo* or, more recently, *Tskhinvali Region* (after the province's capital).

point. Although the Russian ambassador was returned to Georgia at the end of January 2007—a move which some have interpreted to be the start of a normalisation process—the relations between Georgia and Russia still remain in crisis.

Psychological Aspect. The current problems in Georgia-Russia relations can also be explained by an emotional or psychological aspect which, to a certain extent, is related to the fear of “losing Georgia” in the consciousness of Russian society. In particular, a two-hundred year history of co-existence wherein Georgia and Georgians played an important role in the process of shaping Russian imperial statehood and the intellectual culture of Russia resulted in an impression or belief within the collective Russian mentality that Georgians were “ours.” The Soviet era is of special note because Georgia’s resort and recreational attractiveness became apparent amongst Russians. At the same time, Georgian hospitality and the psycho-emotional comfort of Russians in interpersonal relations with Georgians made Russian society interpret “anything Georgian,” as it were, as an inseparable part of their own (Soviet) identity. For decades, even the symbols of such intimacy were born with Gagra, “Borjomi,” “Khvanchkara” or “Suliko” as only a few examples. There are many more similar symbols and there exists an erroneous sense that all of these will disappear after “losing” Georgia. In addition to the aforementioned, a certain disappointment exists as well. It is believed in Russia that for tens of years Georgia used Soviet subsidies and continued to receive inexpensive Russian gas during the years of independence. There were also times when Russia backed up the Georgian government in some of its most critical situations. Against this backdrop, it is regarded that Georgia is ungrateful and “is running away towards others.”

Geopolitical Aspect. A comprehensive analysis of Georgia-Russian Relations also requires that these relations be considered within a global context. From the outset, it should be noted that the relationship with Georgia is a part of Russia's wider strategy elaborated during the presidency of Vladimir Putin which aims at three main goals: a) retain the territorial integrity of the country within current borders, b) undergo economic and technological modernisation and c) restore the status of a world power for Russia. The foreign policy-related prerequisites of achieving these goals have been specified as follows: the preservation of a sole leadership and the reinforcement of its influence over the post-Soviet territory, an increase of Europe's dependence on Russia and a diminishing of US hegemony. **In this context, Russia's political elite perceives a "deterrence" of Georgia's strive towards democratic transformation and integration into the Euro-Atlantic space as a task of vital importance.**² In other words, it is inadmissible that Georgia falls out of the mentioned strategy. Otherwise, it is supposed that a democratic and Western-integrated country of Georgia will become a model for others. Additionally, the temptation of the US and NATO to turn Georgia into their military base will emerge. In this situation, a number of results may occur:

- The separatist movement will intensify in the North Caucasus compromising the territorial integrity of Russia.
- A precedent of providing conditions for swift development under Western security guarantees will arise in the CIS space, including the South Caucasus, which will further shake Russia's already shaken authority and influence.

² According to the statement of Russian Defense Minister, Sergey Ivanov, made at the Security Conference in Munich on 10 February 2007, Georgia's joining NATO is not dangerous for his country. The credibility of this statement raises doubt as it is in conflict with the position of the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, who had earlier stated that Georgia's membership in NATO was unacceptable for Russia's interests.

- The strengthening of Georgia-US security co-operation and military political ties and Georgia's accession to NATO will further enhance US influence in the South Caucasus which might proliferate over other regions of the CIS and Eurasia.
- US military bases and NATO anti-missile systems may be deployed in Georgia as it is likely to happen in some Eastern European countries.³
- The transit attractiveness of Georgia and the whole of the South Caucasus will be increased in regards to transportation of Caspian energy to Western markets thereby to a certain extent lessening Europe's energy dependence on Russia.

Such a threat perception renders impossible Russia's acceptance of Georgia's course of development. This kind of conflict of interest is the ground for constant confrontation between the two countries hindering the normalisation of relations.

"The Putin Factor." Vladimir Putin, who obviously makes every effort to gain an honourable place in the history of modern Russia, will try his best to exclude "a serious failure in the Georgian issue" for the period of his presidency. Allowing the settlement of conflicts in Georgia at the expense of the interests of the loyal-to-Russia Abkhaz and South Ossetian separatists and, most importantly, opening the way for Georgia towards integration in the Euro-Atlantic space would be taken as just that kind of "failure" by the ruling elite of Russia and its wider public. Making problems for Georgia in the aforementioned issues, therefore, can also be explained by the personal political agenda of Vladimir Putin.

³ The denunciation of the deployment of a number of US military contingents and NATO arms in Eastern Europe was the principal thesis of President Putin's speech at the Munich Conference.

Methods and Instruments of Russian Policy

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia found itself in a deep geopolitical knock-down with almost a whole decade required for it to come to its senses and rise to its feet. Within conditions of economic chaos and an ideological vacuum, Russia totally lost a guiding line of development. However strange as it may sound today, there was a time when Russia's joining the "Common European House" and entering NATO was discussed. Naturally, this kind of integration should happen on the basis of Western values and the Western rules of the game. The only issue that Russia, as a successor of the old Empire, could instinctively realise was the need to maintain its influence over the former Soviet republics. This was how the idea of a newly fabricated "integration" came into being that later turned into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The mere idea of a CIS, however, did not prove enough for some "disobedient" neighbours as Georgia which was considered to be the most insubordinate. It was necessary to use a coercive approach by **putting a country into an economic blockade and encouraging centrifugal trends in its peripheral regions**. These methods were immediately used against Georgia and, in part, against some other republics. In the meantime, the "velikoderzhavny" or Great Power spirit came to prevail and the vector of relation and integration with the West changed direction. The main emphasis was placed on the consolidation of its grip on the CIS space. Soon, Russia ceased using economic sanctions and blockades as a political tool since it came to be understood that this could discredit the idea of the CIS.⁴ Instead, the emphasis was made on supporting separatist movements. In the process of confrontation between central authorities and separatists, Russia sided with the latter both

⁴ Russia, however, has not thrown this tool of influence out of its arsenal as was clearly demonstrated by the sanctions imposed against Georgia in 2006 and also the recent developments of Russia's relationship with some other former Soviet republics.

covertly and openly. This brought the conflict zones in Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan to *de facto* independence. Subsequently, Russia managed to secure a leading role in the process of conflict resolution which it has artfully used to “freeze” the process to date. It should be noted that manipulation by “frozen conflicts” has proved to be a rather effective instrument for hindering the democratic development of Moldova and the South Caucasus states including Georgia. This method also proved “successful” in impeding the process of the *rapprochement* of these countries to Western institutions. Indeed, if anything could hinder Georgia’s ultimate integration in NATO or otherwise complicate this process it would be the unresolved conflicts in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region.

Russian military bases and the related infrastructure in Moldova, Georgia and Armenia, as well as **peacekeeping contingents** in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region, are used as effective instruments to influence political processes first and foremost by “freezing” the conflicts. In the case of Georgia, the military bases have already lost this function as they are now being withdrawn.⁵ The military bases in Moldova and Armenia continue to retain a political role. On the other hand, Russia tries its best to keep the format of current peacekeeping operations in Georgia unchanged where it plays the exclusive and or leading role. Russia considers this decisive for keeping the conflict resolution process “frozen.”

The control over energy production and consumer markets and, as a result, strengthening its position as an energy Super Power is one of the most important duties of Russian foreign policy. To this end, Russia is looking **to gain complete or significant control**

⁵ The real status of the base deployed in Gudauta (Abkhazia) is unknown. It was to be closed down in 2001 according to the agreement reached within the framework of the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit. To date, this has been impossible to verify.

over energy facilities (generation, distribution and transit) in both energy producing countries, energy distribution and transit states. This refers mostly to Europe and the post-Soviet territory. In the future, however, Russia plans to conquer the markets of India, China, other countries of the Far East and North America. State controlled companies or those under the patronage of the state are used to implement this policy with energy giant Gazprom in the forefront. The debt-for-assets method is Russia's main tool for getting hold of energy facilities in post-Soviet countries. Of late, Russia has been claiming energy assets in exchange for inexpensive natural gas. Armenia, unfortunately, is a classic example where the whole energy sector, in one form or another, is in the hands of Russian state capital and where the taking over of the transportation and mining industries is only a matter of time. In Georgia, the aforementioned policy is carried out by Gazprom's close associate, Itera, which, in fact, handles the controlling shares of the regional gas distribution companies. Energy companies such as Telasi, Energy Invest (including the chemical manufacturer Azoti) and the ninth and tenth power[-generating] units of Tbilisres (a Tbilisi thermal power plant) are also dependent on Russian state capital. It should be noted that the interests of Russian capital in Georgia are not only limited to the energy sector but also banking, winemaking and telecommunications.

Ideological support to the Russian policy appeared on the agenda from the early 1990s. It was the so-called neo-Eurasianists who made the first attempt to establish a theoretical foundation for the consolidation of influence in the CIS space. They believed that a rejection of Atlanticism,⁶ the strategic control of the US and thwarting Western liberal values was the mission of Russia. Afterwards, the Russian version of the concept of a "liberal empire"

⁶ Atlanticism is a doctrine of co-operation amongst Western European and North American nations regarding political, economic and defense issues.

emerged. This was based upon a more modernised model of Eurasian integration and was more pragmatic and specific in character. The core of the concept was an economic and political expansion of Russia that appeared, upon first glance, to be based on modern universal liberal values. In other words, the doctrine of a "liberal empire" was the attempt to conceal Russia's expansionist plans under the cover of liberal values.⁷ According to one of the arguments of the doctrine, Russia's territorial integrity and resources could not be preserved without its economic and political expansion. Herein it must be noted that the emphasis on an economic expansion is not incidental. Whereas the previous doctrine was designed by academics, the authors of the "liberal empire" are from the Russian oligarchy. Today, everyone can see that the economic expansion of Russia is a reality and the specific provisions of the "liberal empire" have been at work. At the same time, a new attempt of revising the ideological basics of the Russian policy can also be observed with this process going on in the presidential administration. The new political ideology is still to be shaped even though its doctrinal part has already been more or less identified.⁸ This is a concept of a so-called "sovereign democracy" within which the adjustment of democracy to the characteristics, historical experience and development priorities of Russia is the core.⁹ The building of this sort of adapted democracy is a sovereign right of Russia within which neither the West nor anyone else should interfere. Although the new political ideology, like the "liberal empire," calls for the expansion of the economic and political influence over the neighbouring area, it is still an "innovative" one. For the first time since the disintegration of the

⁷ V. Papava and F. Starr, "Russia's Economic Imperialism," *Project Syndicate*, January 2006 (<http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/papava1>)

⁸ See, for example, Vladislav Surkov, "Sovereignty is a Political Synonym of Competitiveness," *Moscow News*, No 7-8, 2006

⁹ For an insightful overview of 'sovereign democracy,' see Nicu Popescu, "Russia's Soft Power Ambitions," *CEPS Policy Brief*, No. 115, October 2006. The discussion on the ideological support of Russia's foreign policy follows this work to a great extent.

Soviet Union, Russia is aspiring towards exporting its own values and it is attempting to do so by way of a universalisation of its own “unique” democratic model. The tactical goal aims at establishing an effective network of ideas, institutions and the media to be able to “promptly disclose the weaknesses of modern ‘orange’ regimes and to restore Russia’s influence at both the governmental and public levels.”¹⁰

Russia is not sparing funds for the **development of a NGO infrastructure throughout CIS countries** with pro-Russian and Russia-financed think tanks mushrooming. These organisations in Ukraine are developing the idea of a “sovereign Ukraine” according to which “Ukraine should not give away its national sovereignty to the European bureaucracy.”¹¹ The “Free Europe-Moldova Foundation” has been established in Moldova with its pro-Russian orientation evident to everyone.¹² Additionally, a CIS election monitoring organisation carries on its “business” in Russia wherein its assessments as a rule differ radically from OSCE observations. As for the South Caucasus, a so-called Development Foundation “Caucasus Institute for Democracy” (Фонд развития «Кавказский институт демократии») is in operation within all three countries of the South Caucasus which frequently organises roundtables, public surveys and cultural events. It regularly produces publications and implements media projects such as the recent opening of a radio station, *Aizald-FM*, broadcasting to the Tskhinvali Region and the founding of *Gudok-Abkhazia* (Гудок-Абхазия), a newspaper that is circulated in Abkhazia.¹³

¹⁰ Ivan Krastev, “Russia’s Post-Orange Empire,” *opendemocracy.net*, 20 October 2005.

¹¹ See interview with Modest Kolerov, <http://kreml.org/interview/60835783>

¹² Nicu Popescu, *op. cit.*

¹³ See more details at www.caucasusid.com

EU Interests in Georgia

Until recently EU-Georgia relations have been that of donor and recipient. Between 1992 and 2004, the EU provided assistance to Georgia amounting to €450 million. In this period, a number of technical, humanitarian assistance and food security projects were implemented including rehabilitation programmes in the conflict zones. After Georgia had been invited to participate in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the relations acquired the character of a formalised partnership. The new relations, however, aim at the modernisation of the Georgian state so as to maximally approximate the political, legal and administration systems to European standards. Unlike the integration project that Russia “offers” to the CIS countries, the European Neighbourhood Policy—and Euro-integration in general—is a voluntary process and is entirely based on the attractiveness of the EU.

Georgia’s invitation to take part in the European Neighbourhood Policy was not accidental. The Rose Revolution intensified the interest not only towards Georgia but to the whole of the region although Georgia, therein, stands out. This attention is determined by Georgia’s increasing importance for Europe. One of the well-argued analyses of these interests has been offered by Dov Lynch¹⁴ as follows:

- (a) The Rose Revolution sparked the legitimate hope for Georgia’s successful democratic transition. A similar feeling had already existed in the wake of the Cold War in the post-Soviet space but was short-lived. Following the change in government, certain successful steps made by the new authorities—the improvement of a budget discipline, the

¹⁴ Dov Lynch, ‘Why Georgia Matters,’ *Chaillot Paper*, No. 86, February 2006, pp. 66-8.

peaceful resolution of the Ajarian crisis and a significant reduction in corruption, amongst others—provided a new logic for the country's development which in turn stimulated the interest of Western partners, including Europe, in fulfilling the abovementioned hope.

- (b) With Bulgaria and Romania's entry into the EU, Georgia became Europe's direct neighbour. The geographic proximity, apart from providing new opportunities for co-operation, has also created a desire in the EU to see Georgia institutionally strong enough to avoid becoming a transit corridor for threats directed towards Europe. First of all, this refers to the spread of organised crime, drug transit and illegal migration. The recent widely publicised case of the smuggling of enriched uranium further intensified the aforesaid will.
- (c) After Europe acknowledged the current or potential challenges of energy security, it became more focused on the task of finding alternative sources. In this context, Caspian hydrocarbons and Georgia as a potential transit country for the transportation of these resources to Europe have received growing interest. This interest became especially stronger after the completion of the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and the South Caucasus gas (Shah-Deniz) pipelines.
- (d) Further keeping the conflicts in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region unresolved may cause a new escalation of the tension. The EU is interested in the settlement of these conflicts as the region will otherwise be turned into an arena of blockades and confrontation with the possibility of a new war spreading over the Black Sea region and directly or indirectly endangering the security of the EU member or candidate countries.
- (e) Georgia is like a laboratory where one can monitor the tendencies existing all over the post-Soviet space, test the

strength of trans-Atlantic links and examine EU-Russia relations. Many processes and trends important for Europe are uncovered or initiated in various forms here. Europe, therefore, is becoming increasingly interested in securing peace in Georgia and the successful completion of its democratic transformation project.

Despite the aforementioned, it is necessary to note that the extent of the EU's involvement in the ongoing processes in Georgia and the whole region does not correspond to the level of its interests. The TRACECA programme is a good example of this. A programme, once started with great pomposity, completed only very few investment projects within its framework with a total cost of just several tens of millions of euros. By way of comparison, 600 million dollars have been spent for the construction of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline. The main challenge of the EU today in our region, therefore, is to become more active and to show itself adequately as regards its aforementioned interests whilst engaging in the foregoing processes.

The EU's Mediatorial Potential: Resources and Constraints

The European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan, as a bilateral mandatory document assigning certain responsibilities to Georgia and the EU, is, at the same time, a new political basis for the EU to become more active. This document clearly states that the EU must facilitate the improvement of Georgia-Russia relations. Four areas have been identified in particular: the adoption and implementation of a bilateral treaty, co-operation on the resolution of conflicts, border delimitation and co-operation in border management and the promotion of stable economic co-operation.¹⁵

¹⁵ EU/Georgia ENP Action Plan, Paragraph 4.1.3,

As regards conflict resolution, the document additionally points out that this issue must be included within the agenda of a EU-Russia bilateral dialogue. The question arises: What are the EU's resources and constraints for it to be able to convince Russia of the necessity towards a normalisation of relations with Georgia? Herein we should clarify that the normalisation of Georgia-Russia relations includes at minimum a three-level task: 1. a discharge of the current critical phase and a return to the state of affairs of spring—summer 2006, 2. Russia's acceptance of Georgia's course towards integration in the Euro-Atlantic space and its real support of conflict resolution in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region and 3. the establishment of a good neighbour and partnership relationship and the signing and ratification of a bilateral treaty.

In this case, the EU's political clout as a broker and its reputation of a relatively unbiased mediator are the main and, apparently, the sole resources in possession of the EU. Indeed, unlike the US, NATO and even the OSCE, the EU is looked upon more or less favourably in Russia. Certainly, everything is relative and the EU has not gained an absolute trust in Russia either. Europe's growing energy dependence on Russian gas, however, and the inadequately light political weight of Europe itself within the international arena, makes the EU a convenient and a most acceptable partner for Russia. Herein we have to note that this "convenience" of a partner for Russia means listening to, in the best case, but rarely following advice. Interestingly, in the short-term Russia does not consider the EU as a competitor in the post-Soviet space including Georgia. This is the result of the incorporation of a large group of East European countries into the EU in 2004 with the Union showing a clear sign of enlargement fatigue and having no intention of expansion into the Soviet space in the foreseeable future. We should also take into consideration

the fact that Europe's interest in energy resources is increasing in Russia's competitor region of the Caspian Sea—in gas, in particular—but it has not thus far been clearly marked out. It is also notable that the EU agrees to play a secondary role in the conflict resolution process in the South Caucasus and is reluctant to offer any initiatives towards changing the Russia dominated formats.¹⁶ The "European threat" for Russia is more real in the long-term. Within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the participant countries, including Georgia, will reach a qualitatively new level of development as a result of jointly implemented Action Plans and the subsequent advanced formats of co-operation. Consequently, political, legal and administrative systems alien to Russia will develop in the major part of the post-Soviet area creating a favourable ground for the consolidation of Western interests and influence. From this point of view, Russia and the EU are competitors in the post-Soviet space. This is the very reason why the EU does not have the full trust of Russia.

Additionally, there are other factors that limit the potential of the EU's influence on Russia; namely:

- a) The main weakness of the EU relates to the multiplicity of perceptions of the outside world. A "mosaic-like approach" is particularly revealed in relation to the post-Soviet space. This is equally true in regards to Russia and other CIS regions or specific countries. This refers to the fact that, let us say, Lithuania and Portugal possess a different knowledge and motivation when the EU is making any decision regarding Georgia-related issues. When there is no common or shared

¹⁶ Of late the EU shows an increasing interest in resolving the conflicts in Georgia. Notably, a new 15-point plan for speeding up conflict resolution in Georgia, as yet undisclosed to the public, is being discussed in Brussels. This plan is based on a comprehensive report prepared by the EUSR in tandem with the European Commission. For further details see <http://euobserver.com/9/23744/?print=1>.

vision, it is impossible to draw out a target-oriented policy and design its effective implementation strategy. This is the very reason why EU policy is frequently more impulsive, inconsistent and event-driven rather than one which is based on a well thought-out strategy.

- b) The abovementioned interests of the EU towards Georgia are not existential. Georgia is not Serbia nor is the South Caucasus the Western Balkans. The current developments in the region, although important, are not placed amongst the EU's highest priorities. The EU's priority list today certainly contains energy security, Iran and Kosovo with the South Caucasus and Georgia only following.
- c) The EU is in a certain internal political crisis. The enlargement fatigue and the "failure" of the French and Dutch referenda diminish the resources for carrying out a consistent foreign policy. Additionally, the rules and procedures of the EU itself do not allow the implementation of an expedient and active policy similar to that of the US including from the standpoint of the mobilisation of financial resources.¹⁷ Moreover, because of the absence of the mentioned common vision within Europe, a decision-making process upon the elaboration of assistance programmes towards a specific region or country is quite competitive: some lobby the South Caucasus, some lobby the Mediterranean Region and others focus on the Middle East and so on.
- d) The primary hindrance is the "Russia factor" itself since the EU has many of the aforementioned priority issues to settle with Moscow. One of these is particularly topical and gaining vital importance in the course of a long-term prospective: this is the issue of securing a stable energy supply from Russia. Because of this, the EU is limited in "disbursing" significant diplomatic and political resources for the issues

¹⁷ Dov Lynch,, op.cit, p. 72

related to Georgia. In addition, if the EU starts to be actively involved in the process of conflict resolution, including towards the modification of current formats, an issue on which Georgia eagerly insists, Russia will become annoyed and the EU's resource of a "mediator" will shrink significantly. Furthermore, as the presidential elections in Russia approach, the "Georgian question" will gain more weight. It is expected that the political situation for a radical normalisation of Georgia-Russia relations may not be favourable during the electoral rally and Russia may turn a deaf ear to the European messages.

Based on the aforementioned, it is assumed that it will be a difficult task for the EU alone to persuade Russia towards a *complete normalisation* of relations with Georgia. For this, the EU possesses neither enough will nor the political resources. This does not mean, however, that the EU is unable to *assist in improving* these relations. Moreover, in the case of co-ordinated actions with the US and other international players, it is not excluded that Russia would "yield" in favour of the territorial integrity of Georgia and its chosen course. Before this ideal situation comes to be, the EU alone can still play its important role in the accomplishment of the aforementioned first level task as regards the normalisation of Georgia-Russia relations. In other words, discharging the present critical situation and the restoration of the status of the first half of 2006 is an achievable goal. The international community is doing much in this regard and the EU's voice in this joint effort occupies a significant place. Statements of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union as, likewise, the visit of the EU troika to Moscow made a difference with Russia sending its ambassador back to Georgia and, thus, making the first step towards relaxing the situation. This may not mean much by itself but the political temperature has obviously reached the necessary

level to “melt the ice.” As it seems now, the main emphasis in the EU’s short-term mediation will be on the restoration of the 2006 *status quo ante*. If this happens, it must not, however, be understood as an unconditional consent on the part of Russia. Moscow’s two principal objectives this year vis-à-vis Georgia are:

1. getting Georgia’s consent on its WTO membership and
2. leaving the formats of conflict resolution unchanged.

Expectedly, the international community, the EU amongst it, may urge Georgia to agree with Russia’s requests. As for the second level task, which is associated with removing the two irritants in Georgia-Russia relations (Georgia’s integration into NATO and the unsettled conflicts), the EU is unable to accomplish it alone because of the aforementioned constraints. The EU will probably continue to include Georgian problems within a bilateral dialogue with Russia but this will not be a sufficient condition. The gist and tone of Putin’s speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference show that the dialogue with Russia, on the further expansion of NATO, in particular, will become difficult.¹⁸ Accordingly, the prospects of Russia accommodating the course of Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration will become more difficult and which will, in their turn, negatively affect the process of the normalisation of relations between the two countries. It will also become a difficult task to persuade Russia to agree to any constructive action in the conflict zones. Within this context, all of the above-described is becoming a serious challenge for the EU. It would probably be better if the EU put the emphasis on overcoming the problems related to conflict resolution indirectly. In other words, instead of exhausting its resources in a diplomatic wrestle with Russia, it might be wiser if the EU focus on changing the logic of the circumstances around the conflicts.¹⁹ What is in mind is to support confidence building between Georgians and the residents of the conflict zones and to

¹⁸ A. Lievin, ‘The west must set a strategy for a resurgent Russia,’ *Financial Times*, 9 March 2007

¹⁹ Dov Lynch, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

develop the habit of co-operation amongst them. These efforts would unfreeze the process of conflict resolution from within and, thus, one of the major irritants in Georgia-Russia relations would be removed. The intention of Georgian authorities to engage in a direct dialogue with the parties of both conflicts, although somewhat delayed, is still the right decision. The EU can make a unique contribution in supporting this dialogue and in promoting the process of Euro-Atlantic integration in the conflict zones. The ground already exists for this type of activity to take place in these regions, particularly in Abkhazia where the reputation of the EU is higher than that of other Western institutions. Fortunately, there are positive first steps being taken in this direction which are also associated with the personal enthusiasm of a new EU Special Representative.

Finally, it should be pointed out that Georgia-Russia relations are one of the most complex in modern international affairs. This is an issue on whose resolution depend future contours of world order, at least in the post-Soviet area. Otherwise, the US or international organisations like the Council of Europe, the EU, the OSCE and the UN would not have been interested in resolving this crisis. The way Georgia-Russia relations will be regulated largely determines the future behaviour of Russia in the international arena. Today, as Russia reveals its ambition to introduce new rules of the game in international relations, serious challenges emerge for Georgia in the realisation of its chosen course. Under these circumstances, it is crucial that Georgia keep the chosen course but with more responsibility and care. Concerning the international community, including the EU, it can play an essential role in regulating relations between Georgia and Russia via well-co-ordinated actions. The task is not a simple one as it requires the accurate identification of the role of the stakeholders based upon an equally accurate assessment of their potential.

არჩილ გეგეშიძე არის საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების კვლევის ფონდის (GFSIS) წამყვანი მკვლევარი. მისი აკადემიური ინტერესების სფერო მოიცავს სამხრეთ კავკასიაში რეგიონული უსაფრთხოებისა და თანამშრომლობის, აგრეთვე ევრო-ატლანტიკური ინტეგრაციის საკითხებს. ა. გეგეშიძის მრავალრიცხოვან ნაშრომთა შორის აღსანიშნავია საქართველოს საგარეო და უსაფრთხოების პოლიტიკის, ასევე “ახალი აბრეშუმის გზის” განვითარების შესახებ პუბლიკაციები. მას სხვადასხვა დროს განხორციელებული აქვს კვლევები ფულბრაიტისა და საერთაშორისო პოლიტიკის სამეცნიერო პროგრამების ფარგლებში. ა. გეგეშიძე საჯარო სამსახურში მრავალწლიანი მოღვაწეობის პერიოდში იყო საქართველოს სახელმწიფო მეთაურის თანაშემწე ეროვნული უსაფრთხოების საკითხებში და პრეზიდენტის მთავარი მრჩეველი საგარეო-პოლიტიკის დარგში. ამჟამად იგი მონაწილეობს GFSIS-ის კვლევით და სასწავლო პროგრამებში.



ა. გეგეშიძე არის გეოგრაფიულ მეცნიერებათა კანდიდატი და ფლობს საქართველოს საგანგებო და სრულუფლებიანი ელჩის დიპლომატიურ რანგს.

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